



**Testimony in Support of H.B 5208, AN ACT CONCERNING HOUSING  
OPPORTUNITIES FOR JUSTICE IMPACTED PERSONS**

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Dear Chairs Williams and Lopes, Vice Chairs Smith and Anwar, Ranking Members Polletta and Cicarella, and Members of the Housing Committee:

My name is Pia Baldwin Edwards, and I am a resident of New Haven. I'm writing to communicate my strong support for **H.B 5208 - An Act Concerning Housing Opportunities for Justice Impacted Persons**. This bill would make it a discriminatory practice for housing providers to not consider a prospective tenant based on a criminal conviction after certain time periods. Specifically, housing authorities would not be allowed to consider convictions of misdemeanors over 3 years before the rental application, or convictions of felony over 7 years before the rental application. It is imperative that it passes, to provide a second chance for many who have moved beyond convictions.

Currently in Connecticut, housing authorities can refuse to rent to any formerly incarcerated person, even for crimes committed many years ago. Barriers to reentry from the prison system are detrimental both to the formerly incarcerated and to the communities where those individuals come from. The lack of fair housing for formerly incarcerated people is a major roadblock for those trying to re-emerge in society, and contributes heavily to the "revolving door" of homelessness and punishment—including a state recidivism rate of 34%. Even for smaller misdemeanor charges without any conviction that happened years ago — such as conviction for conduct that occurred when the applicant was a minor — under present law, an applicant may be denied housing for that reason.

Approximately 25% of Connecticut's homeless population is living with a criminal record. By not providing fair housing for formerly incarcerated people, Connecticut is perpetuating a cycle that funnels people in and out of the prison system and makes the re-entry process all the more difficult for everyone involved. This process would be vastly improved by increased housing opportunities. According to three years of data (2016-2019) from the Connecticut Coalition to End Homelessness' (CCEH) Homeless Management System — 48% of people who utilized homeless shelters had a DOC criminal record.

2020 Marshall Project survey currently incarcerated people across the country, asked what could have kept them out of prison - one of top answers was access to affordable housing For homeless people on parole/probation supervision, it is easier to break the rules of supervision - the law would prohibit discrimination of housing authorities against potential renters who violate parole/probation with conduct that wouldn't be criminal if they weren't prohibited by that condition. There's been a huge demand in community services to provide for formerly incarcerated people, in part as compensation for the lack of fair housing for the formerly incarcerated. However, funding has been cut by nearly 15%, or around \$5.8 million, for these services. Instead of relying solely on community organizations, this bill would allow individuals to advocate for themselves in securing affordable housing without being turned away directly by housing authorities.

In conclusion, I urge you to provide a second chance at housing for those who committed crimes outside of the 3 and 7 year windows as outlined in H.B 5208. Instead of subjecting formerly incarcerated Connecticut residents to a cycle of criminalization — even for minor misdemeanors committed long ago — this state should seek to make the re-entry process as smooth as possible by mitigating the hardships that come when individuals emerge from prison. I urge you to favorably vote this bill out of the Housing Committee so that a second chance may be given to those who most need it.

Thank you for your time and consideration,

Pia Baldwin Edwards  
New Haven, CT

